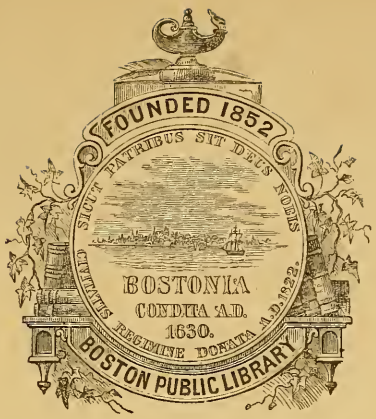

PAMPHLETS.

Military biography.

A SKETCH

OF THE

LIFE AND SERVICES

OF

Gen. Otho Holland Williams,

READ BEFORE THE

Maryland Historical Society,

ON THURSDAY EVENING, MARCH 6, 1851.

By OSMOND TIFFANY.

BALTIMORE:
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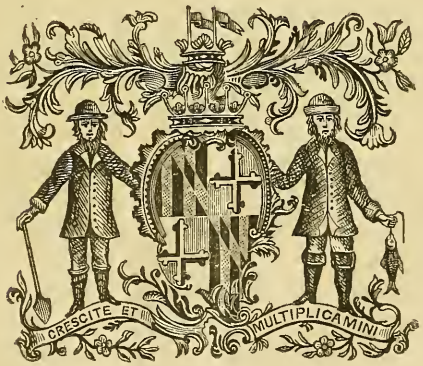

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Mr. President:

The events of the American Revolution are so nearly connected with our own times, that the actors in that great struggle seem yet to be to us as living men. We open the portal of the past century, and are with those who once like ourselves, breathed and thought, and who now, lie not silent or forgotten in the tomb.

Their deeds live in our memory; their examples are glorious as of old: their words of hope in dark hours, and of their joy in success, still burn before us:—they have become the great historians of their age. Among this band of gallant men, who gave themselves with all their soul to liberty, I could name none of our native State, who displayed a more patient, disinterested, and zealous spirit, than the pure and chivalrous Otho Holland Williams.

He was born in the county of Prince George's, in March, 1749. His parentage was highly respectable, his ancestors emigrating from Wales, and he being of the second generation after their settlement in Maryland.

Had his days been wholly passed in the enjoyment of peace, his influence would not have been lost. He would still have left to his friends the same invaluable legacy of a good name, but it was his fortune to deserve and gain a wider celebrity. He was his father's oldest son, and in the year succeeding his birth, his home was changed to the mouth of the Conococheague Creek, in Frederick, near Washington county. In that beautiful region of country, watered by the stream that lends its name to the valley, were spent the few short years of his boyhood. There he learned to love the aspect of fields and groves,

the memory of which was his solace long after, in many dark and trying hours, for we find in the midst of the toils of the camp, that his spirit yearns for rural peace and solitude. The love of nature is ever ennobling; it perhaps contributed to form the character of the future hero.

It is a favorite theme with biographers to dwell on parental precepts, especially on those of the mother. We have no anecdotes of this period, but we may yield to a happy idea, and imagine young Williams listening to the accents of a mother's lip, with the true deference which he always paid to goodness. We may see him, among his little playmates on his father's farm, already showing those traits of character, which guided him in the path to honor: that love of truth, that physical and moral courage, which won in time the confidence of his great commander-in-chief, who had himself early shone in the same qualities. We may picture him crossing the fields, at early morning hours, to the rustic school, there to recite the simple lesson, and to be instructed in his mother tongue, which he afterwards used with the grace of a scholar. But the sunshine of his boyhood was soon clouded—his father, Joseph Williams, died, leaving but a small property to seven children; and Otho at the age of thirteen, was thrown upon his own exertions. He was placed with his brother-in-law, Mr. Ross, in the Clerk's Office of Frederick county. Here he remained several years, diligently occupied in studying the duties of the bureau, and when he was duly qualified, took charge of it himself, for a while, until removed to a similar situation in Baltimore. It was in this vocation that he acquired those habits of regularity and method, which were so signally manifested when called to situations of the highest trust.

His appearance at this time, when about eighteen years of age, is thus described by his friend and fellow-soldier, Gen. Samuel Smith: "He was," says the writer, "about six feet high, elegantly formed; his whole appearance and conduct much beyond his years; his manner, such as made friends of all who knew him."

Thus does he appear before us, while to use Burke's apt expression, he was yet in the gristle, and had not hardened into

the bone of manhood. But he was already a man in his high sense of honor, his unsullied integrity, and the polish of his address: if he had not won laurels, he had acquired the esteem of the worthy.

Thus endowed, we learn that he entered into commercial life, in Fredericktown, shortly before the commencement of the American Revolution. There is little doubt, that had this course been pursued, it would have been crowned with eminent success, for he afterwards united, to an extraordinary degree, military genius with scientific business habits. But when the clouds, which had so long been gathering over the sun of peace, burst at last, all thought of pursuing quiet trade was abandoned. The spirit that prompted Putnam to reverse the Scriptural promise, and beat the plough-share into the sword, kindled kindred feelings in the breast of Williams. A company was formed in Fredericktown, and under the command of Capt. Price, marched for Boston. Williams might easily have obtained the captaincy, but with the modesty which always kept pace with his success, he declined to press a claim to command, saying to the committee, that though ambitious to lead, he was willing to serve. This spirit uniformly attended him—he deferred cheerfully to authority himself, and exacted obedience from those whom he commanded. He was a strict disciplinarian, as all good officers are, but governed his own conduct by his rigid adherence to the rules of superiors. In reporting an officer to Gen. Greene, for disobedience, he says: "When orders are received with contempt, and rejected with insolence, examples are requisite to re-establish subordination, the basis of discipline."

But, before attempting to trace the career of the soldier, it will be by no means uninteresting, or uninstructive, to depict the man. His letters to his family and friends, are true mirrors in which he was reflected, and we cannot more fully present him, than by a few sentences from his correspondence. Indeed, I have found his letters so graphic and elegant in style, so illustrative of any subject on which they touch, that I have made large extracts, believing that they would be of much greater historic value, concerning the scenes and actions of which they treat,

than any description of mine. His views of life were most cheerful and happy—he writes to his brother thus:

"I have seen a great variety of life, and profess most seriously, that there is more true felicity to be found in a bare competence and domestic industry, than in any other circumstances. My observations on others confirm this opinion, and I wish to have an opportunity of experiencing the satisfaction which I am sure is to be found in rural employments. We should not hope to be wealthy, or fear to be poor; we never shall want; and whoever considers the true source of his happiness, will find it in a very great degree, arising from a delicate concern for those dependent upon him, useful employments, and the approbation of his friends."

He was ambitious, but his ambition never led him astray: and through all circumstances of life, he was governed by a deeply religious faith. His own words precisely express his feelings: "It would give me pain, if the world should believe any person, with the same advantages, may do more than I may. Fortune does a great deal in all military adventures, and, therefore, I am not to say whether this reproach will come upon me or not. But you may rely upon it, my good friend, discretion and fortitude shall govern my conduct; and in the interim, I commit myself to that Power whose eye is over all his works, and by whose goodness I have been preserved in numerous perils."

We do not learn that Williams was engaged in any very noted service until the following year, but he acquired the confidence and esteem of his superiors—among others Gen. Gates, whose friendship often professed, was afterwards proven. In 1776 he was promoted to the rank of Major, in a rifle regiment formed from Maryland and Virginia troops, and we learn that his first trial in actual battle, occurred at the fall of Fort Washington, on the Hudson River. He was stationed in a wood with his troops, in advance of the Fort, and was attacked by the Hessian allies. They were several times repulsed with heavy loss, but being reinforced, they succeeded in beating back Williams and his company into the Fort, where all were eventually taken prisoners. The enemy accomplished this by reinforcements, as

has been already mentioned, and from the unfortunate condition of the rifles of the attacked party. By long continued and incessant fire, these had become so foul as to be nearly useless, and Williams reluctantly retreated at the last moment, only to delay capture for a short period. The feelings of an officer, when obliged to yield his sword, and suffer an imprisonment, he knows not how long or cruel it may be, must be sufficiently agonizing to feel that utter inactivity is forced upon him, at the very instant that his country is most in need of the services he would cheerfully render. In the last attack of the Hessians, Williams received a severe and dangerous shot wound in the groin, though he entirely recovered from its effects in due time. His career was suddenly checked, and he was doomed to languish fifteen months, before he again saw the sun shine on his freedom. The first half of his captivity, though painful enough to an ardent patriot, was not total eclipse.

He was placed on Long Island on parole, and among many annoyances, there occurred some incidents which cheered him in captivity. He formed the acquaintance of Major Ackland, a British officer, and they became firm friends. The elegant person, and finished manners of Williams, procured him access to circles as a gentleman, which would have closed to him solely as a prisoner; and under the guidance of Ackland, visiting the opposite city of New York, he sometimes appeared in the fashionable houses, which reversing the present order,were then measured on the scale of style, by proximity to the battery.

It is related that on one occasion, after Williams had been dining with Lady Ackland, his good friend the Major, and he, sallied forth for a ball, and that although the company were much struck with the elegant figures and demeanor of the two friends, and although the Briton made all effort to introduce the captive, the gentlemen of the party could not forget the enemy to welcome the stranger, and the ladies treated him with extreme coldness. Ackland finding that all his efforts were vain, took Williams by the arm and led him from the room, saying, "Come, this company is too exclusive for us." This was not the only occasion on which Major Ackland proved his friendship and sympathy for Americans.

His fate was a melancholy one, and such as he little deserved. After the war of the Revolution, and when he had returned to his own country, on the occasion of a dinner, the valor of American soldiers became the subject of conversation. On their merit being denied, Ackland defended them, and in the warmth of argument with a brother officer, to some assertion, replied that he lied. The insult was of course unpardonable, and could only be settled by a duel, in which he was shot dead.

During the period of Williams' confinement on Long Island, it was the pleasure of some of the British officers to stroll among the American prisoners, and tauntingly ask them in what trade they had been employed. When Williams was asked this impertinent question by a titled officer, he replied, that he had been bred in that situation which had taught him to rebuke and punish insolence, and that the questioner would have ample proof of his apprenticeship on a repetition of his offence. The noble did not attempt it, or demand satisfaction for the contempt with which he had been treated, but it is probable, that through his instrumentality, Williams was accused of carrying on a secret correspondence with Washington. There was, indeed, some apparent foundation for suspicion in Williams' superior ability, and from the respect paid to him by his fellow-prisoners. He was seized, and without one word of defence on his part being listened to, without being suffered to confront his accusers, he was suddenly removed to the provost jail in New York.

Here he was delivered to the tender mercies of harsh turnkeys, and confined in a room about sixteen feet square that was seldom visited by the breath of heaven, and always remaining in a state of loathsome filth. Among other prisoners, was the celebrated Ethan Allen, and he shared the miserable den, in which Williams was confined. Their only visitors were wretches who came to glut their brutal curiosity, and to torture their victims with loud sentiments of delight in the anticipation of seeing them hanged. Letters complaining of such cruel treatment were repeatedly but vainly addressed to the commandant of New York, and they thus suffered for seven or eight months.

Their health was much impaired, for their food was of the vilest sort, and scarce enough to keep soul and body together,

and to add to these discomforts, the anxiety that preyed upon their minds, was terrible in the extreme. The naturally fine constitution of Williams was much impaired, and he never recovered entirely from the effects of his imprisonment. But he is still full of hope, to which, though not written at the time of his incarceration, his own words to one of his family thus bear witness: "I flatter myself I shall still see a day, a prosperous day, when we shall all be assembled in some agreeable spot in the neighborhood of Hagerstown, where we shall mutually embrace each other, with joy and tenderness, and cheerfully recount the tedious hours which the distresses of our country oblige us to pass in absence, and when the dangers that are passed will serve as a subject for an evening tale." But finally, the doors of his prison-house were thrown asunder and he was free.

After the surrender of Burgoyne, Gen. Gates proved his friendship by stipulating positively for Williams' release, and he was exchanged for his old friend Major Ackland, who had been taken prisoner with the British army. Gen. Phillips, the commandant of New York, anxious to offer some excuse for the rigor with which Williams had been treated, asked him to dine with him, but the invitation was properly rejected. During his captivity his native State had not been unmindful of him, he had been appointed to the command of the 6th regiment of the Maryland line, and he joined the army in New Jersey, shortly before the battle of Monmouth, fought in June, 1778. The result of this engagement is well known: it gave great encouragement to the American troops, and Col. Williams has left a little description of the joy with which the following anniversary of Independence was celebrated, a joy enhanced by the favorable issue of the late conflict, and moreover, is one of the few instances on record in which the day has been celebrated without a patriotic oration.

His letter is dated Camp New Brunswick, July 6th, 1778:— "On the 4th inst. the anniversary of American Independence was celebrated in the following manner. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon, a cannon was discharged as a signal for the troops to get under arms, half an hour afterwards, the second fire was a

signal for the troops to begin their march, and at four the third signal was given, for the troops to drawn up in two lines, on the west side of the Raritan, which they did in beautiful order. A flag was then hoisted for the *feu de joie* to begin. Thirteen pieces of artillery were then discharged, and a running fire of small arms went through the lines, beginning at the right of the front line, catching the left, and ending at the right of the second line. The field pieces in the intervals of brigades, were discharged in the running fire, thus affording a harmonious and uniform display of music and fire, which was thrice well executed. After the *feu de joie* the general officers and officers commanding brigades, dined with his Excellency. Yesterday a number of field officers shared the same fate, and I had the satisfaction of seeing the old warrior in very fine spirits."

During the remainder of Col. Williams' sojourn in the Northern States, we do not learn that he was in any position to prove his skill as a soldier, excepting in those qualities which are too often under-estimated by the public. His regiment when he took command of it, was rather noted for looseness of discipline, and did not stand upon a mark with others of the line, but in a very short time, under Williams' prompt and active organization, it became equal if not superior, in thorough discipline, to any in the whole army.

A soldier should certainly not be deemed unable, who has few opportunities of any brilliant success, and who is only known by the admirable order of his troops.

From several of Williams' letters written about this time, we learn that if there was little chance of fame, he found time to fall in love, proving that though ambitious of the glory of Mars, he was not insensible to the blandishments of Venus.

But it is time, that we approach the sphere of action in which Williams was particularly distinguished, and where he acquired such honor, as to raise him to eminence among the greatest Generals of this country. We allude to the war in the Southern States, particularly the Carolinas, in which some of the bloodiest and most obstinate battles were fought, during the whole revolution. The entire country in that portion of the States, was completely reduced and subdued by the superior generalship of

Sir Henry Clinton, who had left New York, for the express purpose of subjugating the Carolinas. He had been eminently successful, and it will not be unimportant to pass briefly in review, the condition to which those States had been reduced, when Congress determined to succor them, by reinforcements of Northern troops, among which were the Maryland and Virginia lines. On receipt of the news of Clinton's expedition, Charleston, then in possession of the Americans, had been placed in a state of defence, in the manner deemed best calculated to resist the enemy, though the garrison was enfeebled by disease, want of money, and want of enthusiasm among the soldiery. Many refused to serve again, after the late campaign in Georgia, unwilling to leave their homes, and having no faith in their own strength, against a powerful and amply munitioned foe. They also had strong grounds, through the proclamations of the English, to believe that non-resistance to the Crown would purchase security from fire and pillage, for it was the policy of the English utterly to destroy, as far as possible, all kinds of property belonging to the Republicans. The garrison of Charleston consisted of scarcely five thousand men, under command of General Lincoln, while Clinton's force alone, amounted to upwards of eight thousand. The garrison, after an obstinate defence of forty days, was obliged to surrender to the enemy, before which time, all hope of succor or escape was reluctantly abandoned. Various expeditions were planned by the American troops, but almost every one was prevented, or destroyed, by the ceaseless vigilance and activity of the British, among whom none was ever more conspicuous than the well remembered Tarlton. No sooner did the British standard wave over the ramparts of Charleston, than Clinton determined to use the most energetic means, to ensure the reduction of the entire province. To this end, he planned several expeditions, all of which succeeded even beyond his own hopes. The royalists joined his army in great numbers, and the Americans were defeated at all points. The complete rout and terrible slaughter of the Republicans, under Col. Buford, at Wacsaw, the enemy being led on by Tarlton, for a time utterly prostrated the vigor of the Carolinians, who thereupon submitted in despair. Clinton, then by promise of

amnesty, endeavored to maintain the authority which British bayonets had again acquired, but he excepted those who had been instrumental in the defence of Charleston. This measure was productive, as we shall see, of the most fatal consequences, and in time overturned all hopes of those which he so strenuously endeavored to introduce. His object was to put down the slightest attempt at rebellion, and those who had lately fought for Congress, were forced to take up arms for the Crown, instead of being suffered to remain as prisoners of war, on parole.

This unexpected act of tyranny produced a state of society of which, at this period, we can have but little idea.

Those who had fought bravely in defence, were treated with the most cruel persecutions, their property plundered and destroyed, while those who submitted supinely to their fate, were sometimes rewarded, or at least suffered to remain undisturbed. This naturally engendered a bitter feeling, even between families, and the complete separation of members of the same flock, were but the happiest results: their hate was frequently kindled into a flame, only quenched in blood. Williams has left a graphic picture of the state of society at that time, and it may be remarked, that his opinion of the inhabitants was by no means high.

He says, writing to his brother:—"There are a few virtuous good men in this State, and in Georgia; but a great majority of the people is composed of the most unprincipled, abandoned, vicious vagrants that ever inhabited the earth. The daily deliberate murders committed by pretended Whigs, and reputed tories, (men who are actually neither one thing nor the other in principle,) are too numerous and too shocking to relate. The licentiousness of various classes and denominations of villains, desolate this country, impoverish all who attempt to live by other means and destroy the strength and resources of the country, which ought to be collected and united, against a common enemy.

"You may rely on it, my dear brother, that the enemy have had such footing and influence in this country that their success in putting the inhabitants together by the ears, has exceeded even their own expectations: the distraction that prevails sur-

passes any thing I ever before witnessed, and equals any idea, which your imagination can conceive, of a desperate and inveterate civil war."

But horrible as this state of society was, it had some redeeming features; fire might consume, a savage soldiery might plunder, the sun might scorch and not gladden, and the rivers might run with blood, instead of water, but the women of the Carolinas stood superior to their husbands, their sons, and their brothers, and were unconquered, unconquerable. They indeed, bore the fiery trial, and preferred exile to submission, death to slavery. They incited their kindred never to lay down their arms, until the last foe had vanished from their soil. They would with the courage of Joan of Arc, have grasped the sword, and perished at the stake. They would not give their hand in the light dance to a Briton; they gave their heart with their hand to the meanest of their countrymen. They threw the gold bracelet into the scale to lighten the iron fetter. They feared not the contagion of the prison ships, nor the damp of the dungeon. They instilled into their drooping relatives new hopes, and urged them once more to draw the sword, and throw away the scabbard. It is related that Col. Tarlton once asked a lady in Charleston, the name of the Camomile blossom. "It is called," answered the noble woman, "the Rebel flower, because it flourishes best when most trampled on." The influence of woman prevailed, the sword seemed sharpened, instead of blunted by the blows it had taken, and the spirit of '76 again animated the soldiery. The arrival of Lafayette about this period, was most welcome: he brought encouraging news, and instilled into the colonists hopes which were soon verified by the arrival of the French fleet, commanded by Admiral de Tiernay, in Newport harbor. Then the people once more flew to arms, and

> The war that for a space did fail
> Now trebly thundering swelled the gale.

General Gates took command in July, 1780, superseding Baron de Kalb; and Col. Williams with his regiment appears at the seat of war, in the Southern States, about that time. He assumed by appointment the important post of deputy Adjutant

General, which added greatly to his duties, but which he discharged through his whole period of service, with exemplary fidelity. He has left a detailed narrative of the campaign of 1780, (published in Johnston's Life of Greene,) and his letters give most graphic accounts of the battles in which he was engaged, and the trials in other forms, through which he passed. The sharp action where blows were given and taken, proved less arduous and scarce more dangerous, than the sufferings of the army without an enemy in sight. He writes soon after his arrival—"The affairs of our little southern army are much deranged, and we find ourselves under very considerable embarrassments in our present position; the want of provisions is an inconvenience we have often experienced, but we have never been in a country so unwilling to supply us as at present. By military authority, we collect a kind of casual subsistence that can scarcely be called our daily bread. The fatigue of campaigning in this country is almost inconceivable. I have slept, when I have had time to sleep, in my clothes. I seldom divest myself of my sword, boots or coat; my horse is constantly saddled, and we eat when provisions are to be got, and we have nothing else to do. The dangers of the field are neither more frequent, nor more fatal, than those attending the fatigues and accidents that reduce an army—from long experience, I find myself so capable of sustaining the fatigue, and by my good fortune (the favor of Providence) I have so often escaped the danger, that I am contented to do my duty, and submit myself to that fate which Heaven ordains."

The campaign of 1780 was a most unfortunate one for the Southern States, as that of 1776 was for the Northern. Soon after General Gates took command, the battle of Camden was fought, which resulted in the total defeat of the Americans. Col. Williams gives an account of it in his sketch of the campaign, but I have not been able to find any of his private letters on the subject. The battle was fought on the 16th of August, and from returns which Williams collected, the actual number of fighting men or rather of able bodied troops, for some did not fight at all, amounted only to three thousand and fifty-two, about one-half of the nominal strength of the army. The

numbers of the enemy were much superior, and at the very time that Gen. Gates had determined to march upon Camden, Lord Cornwallis, commander-in-chief, (Clinton having returned to New York,) apprised of all that was passing in the interior of the States, determined to march himself to reinforce Lord Rawdon, thinking it highly probable from the position of the American army, that Camden would be a point of speedy attack. He arrived there two days before the battle, and unwilling to hazard an assault, determined to surprise the rebels in their place of encampment at Clermont. Thus both armies, ignorant of each other's intentions, moved about the same hour of the night, and approaching each other, met half way between their respective encampments at midnight. An exchange of fire between the advanced guards was the first notice that either army had of the other. Hostilities were for the time suspended, and from one of the prisoners taken in the skirmish, Williams learned that Lord Cornwallis led the army with three thousand troops under his especial command, besides those of Lord Rawdon's.

This intelligence threw consternation into the American army, and Gen. Gates called a council of war. It was decided that the time had passed for any course but fighting. Frequent skirmishes occurred throughout the night, which served to display the relative force and situation of the two armies. Col. Williams narrates another circumstance which contributed to distress the Americans, and he says:

"Nothing ought to be considered as trivial in an army which in any degree affects the health or spirit of the troops, upon which often, more than upon number, the fate of battles depends. The troops of Gen. Gates' army had frequently felt the consequence of eating bad provisions, but at this time a hasty meal of quick baked bread and fresh meat, with a dessert of molasses mixed with mush or dumplings, operated so cathartically as to disorder very many of the men, who were breaking the ranks all night, and were certainly much debilitated before the action commenced in the morning."

On the morning of the 16th, the two armies came together, and Williams at the very onset distinguished himself by his

valor, and by his suggestion to Gen. Gates that the enemy should be attacked while displaying by Gen. Stevens' brigade, already in line of battle, as first impressions were very important. Gen. Gates at once replied, "that's right, let it be done." This, however, could not be accomplished until the right wing of the British was discovered in line, too late to attack them while displaying. Williams at the head of forty or fifty men then commenced the attack, and kept up a brisk fire. But the militia no sooner beheld the enemy advance impetuously, than they threw down their arms without firing and fled instantly. This was followed by others, acting in the same pusillanimous style, and at least two-thirds of the army never fired a shot. Williams writes:

"He who has never seen the effect of a panic upon a multitude can have but an imperfect idea of such a thing. The best disciplined troops have been enervated and made cowards by it. Armies have been routed by it, even where no enemy appeared to furnish an excuse. Like electricity, it operates instantly; like sympathy, it is irresistible where it touches."

The regular troops, including those of Maryland, stood their ground, and by tremendous fires of musketry kept the enemy for a while in check. Several times did the British give way and as often rallied. But two brigades of American troops remained firm upon the field. Williams called upon his regiment not to fly; he saw that to avoid retreat was impossible but wished it to be accomplished with credit. The troops stood well and returned the hot fire of the enemy with zeal, until Cornwallis, charging with his whole force of dragoons and infantry, put them to total rout. Not a company retired in good order, but Williams attributed this not to want of courage; they had fought against desperate odds, besides having to fight for those who so ingloriously fled, but it appears that there was no command to retreat from any general officer until it became too late to retire in order. Williams gained in this action, unfortunate as it proved, a character for cool courage, for discretion, and that thorough knowledge of tactics so essential in the officer, and without which impetuosity would be but an explosive gas, but which, guarded by the master-hand of the philosopher, burns

steadily through the thickest gloom. Never off his guard, he knew when and where to strike, and when to reserve the blow that opportunity only served to encourage; for it is hard for the brave in battle to retain the gauntlet of defiance, and so armed, "out of the nettle danger pluck the flower safety."

General Gates never entirely recovered from the odium showered upon him by the event of the battle of Camden, and the consequences finally led to his displacement, and the appointment of Gen. Greene to the command of the Southern army, but Williams always continued his firm friend, and speaks of him in several instances as the "good old man."

(It is impossible, in a sketch so brief as this, to give any detailed account of the war in the Carolinas; it will be sufficient to introduce successively Col. Williams' graphic pictures of the battles and scenes in which he was engaged.)

The tide of fortune could not flow forever with the English, and at the battle of King's Mountain, in which Williams took part, they were utterly defeated; this victory proved a severe blow to the interests of Lord Cornwallis. Sometimes by good luck, advantages were gained, as in the following circumstance during the same year, and of which Williams gives this account, dated 7th Dec. 1780:

"A few days ago Gen. Morgan, with the Light Infantry of our army and a party of Light Dragoons under Lieut. Col. Washington, moved towards Camden. Col. Rugely's farm was defended by a strong block house, which was garrisoned by Col. Rugely and a party of new levies. A good block house is proof against musketry and sometimes against light artillery. Therefore Gen. Morgan would not risk his troops in an assault, but had recourse to stratagem, and Lieut. Col. Washington executed the plan. He paraded the cavalry in view of the block house and mounted the trunk of a pine tree upon three prongs, instead of a field piece, and which he manned with dismounted dragoons, then summoned Rugely to surrender, which the poltroon did, without hearing a report of this new invented piece of ordnance, and submitted himself with about 100 officers and men to be taken as prisoners of war."

The battle of Cowpens was another blow—perhaps the most decisive victory gained by the Americans during the whole war, and in which the hitherto terrible and fortunate Tarlton was put to total rout.

The retreat of the army through North Carolina, which, so admirably executed, had the effect of leading Cornwallis into Virginia, followed the battle of Cowpens, and gave Williams an opportunity of displaying those qualities of tact, vigilance and prudence, which gain for an officer a fame as deserved as the laurels won in battle. He commanded the rear guard, and succeeded in eluding every effort of the enemy in pursuit. Greene, with a keen eye, early distinguished his abilities, and he became, as long as he remained with the army, one of his general's few and constant advisers. He appointed him Adjutant General, as he had been Deputy under Gates.

The next engagement of consequence is that of Guilford Court House, and Williams has left a short account of it in a hasty letter to his brother. His letter is dated from Camp at Speedwell's furnace, ten miles from Guilford Court House, 1st March, 1781:

"The Southern army has once more come off second best in a general action. Gen. Greene being reinforced with a few small detachments of new levies, which gave the regular battalion a respectable appearance, and a sufficient number of militia to make his force apparently superior to the British army, made the best possible arrangement of his troops, and for many reasons which rendered it almost absolutely necessary, came to a resolution of attacking Lord Cornwallis the first opportunity. When both parties are disposed for action all obstacles are soon overcome. The two armies met at Guilford Court House yesterday at 12 o'clock. Our army was well posted; the action was commenced by the advanced parties of infantry and cavalry, in which our troops were successful, but the situation of the ground not being favorable in our front, our army kept its position and waited the attack of the British. They were opposed wherever they appeared. The militia of North Carolina behaved as usual, but those of Virginia distinguished themselves by uncommon bravery. The regular troops were the last that

had come to action and generally behaved well, but as these were the most inconsiderable in number, the general chose rather to retire than risk a defeat. The retreat was made in tolerable good order, and so stern was the appearance of our regular force, that the enemy did not think proper to press our rear, nor continue the pursuit more than three miles. Our greatest loss is four pieces of artillery and the field."

During the next month another ineffectual attempt was made upon Camden, and pursuing the plan formed of allowing the actors in these scenes to speak for themselves, we have Col. Williams' account of the efforts of the army as follows:

"Camp before Camden, 27 *April*, 1781.

"*Dear Elie*—We have been here ever since the 19th instant, and have made several manœuvres, upon different quarters of the town, but have neither been able to discover advantages, that promised success by a storm, nor to completely invest the place. The town is flanked on the West by the Wateree, and on the East by two deep creeks; the other quarters are strongly fortified. A villain of a drummer went in to the enemy on the the 24th, when we were encamped within a mile of the town, and gave them such information of our circumstances, position and numbers, as induced Lord Rawdon to sally with all his best troops the next morning, about eleven o'clock.

"This was what we wished, and the only hope we had of a speedy reduction of the post. Lieut. Col. Washington was ordered to pass the right flank of the enemy with his cavalry, which he did, and threw himself in their rear. Capt. Kirkwood, with two small companies of light infantry, was behaving bravely in front, and the picquets were doing their duty upon the flanks, when the line was ordered to advance, and the artillery to play upon the enemy. The first Maryland regiment particularly, was ordered to charge bayonets, without firing, but for some cause not yet clearly ascertained, the regiment received orders to retire and then broke. The second regiment retired in consequence. The second Virginia regiment was ordered off, and the first broke. The unfavorable consequences were, that the army lost a glorious opportunity of gaining a complete vic-

tory, taking the town, and biasing the beam of fortune greatly in favor of our cause.

"The action was at no time very warm, but it was durable, and our troops by the gallant exertions of our officers, were rallied frequently, but always fought at long shot. A convincing testimony that this was generally the case, is that none or very few of our men were wounded with buck shot or bayonet. The baggage of our army was sent off to Rugely's, and the troops halted at Saunder's Creek, about two miles South of where we fought last year, and about five miles from Camden. The loss was nearly equal on both sides, if we do not consider the loss of opportunity. We lost about 130 killed and wounded, and from every account the enemy were not more lucky.

"The cavalry, the light infantry, and the guards, acquired all the honor, and the infantry of the battalions all the disgrace that fell upon our shoulders. The cavalry, led on by Washington, behaved in a manner truly heroic. He charged the British army in the rear, took a great number of prisoners, sent many of them off with small detachments, and when he saw we were turning our backs upon victory in front, by a circuitous manœuvre, he threw his dragoons into our rear, passed the line and charged the York volunteers, (a fine corps of cavalry,) killed a number and drove the rest out of the field. Washington is an elegant officer; his reputation is deservedly great. Many of our officers are mortally mortified at our late inglorious retreat. I say mortally, because I cannot doubt that some of us must fall, in endeavoring the next opportunity, to re-establish our reputation. Dear Reputation, what trouble do you not occasion, what danger do you not expose us to! Who but for it, would patiently persevere in prosecuting a war, with the mere remnant of a fugitive army, in a country made desolate by repeated ravages, and rendered sterile by streams of blood. Who but for reputation would sustain the varied evils that daily attend the life of a soldier, and expose him to jeopardy every hour. Liberty, thou basis of reputation, suffer me not to forget the cause of my country, nor to murmur at my fate."

The events of this campaign being active, and following in quick succession, we have an account of the siege of Ninety-six,

a very important post. The fortunes of the war had turned generally in favor of the Americans, although their troops were several times defeated in this campaign. Lord Rawdon was forced to abandon Camden shortly after the events narrated by Williams, and the posts of Fort Watson, Fort Mott, Fort Granby, Nelson's Ferry, Georgetown, Fort Dreadnought and Augusta were all reduced or deserted, and there remained only Charleston and Ninety-six in South Carolina, and Savannah, in Georgia, in the hands of the enemy. The post of Ninety-six was closely besieged for three weeks, and without reinforcements, which the Americans hardly expected, would certainly have been taken. But it so happened, unfortunately, that the garrison was strongly reinforced by Lord Rawdon, and the Americans were obliged to abandon the siege. Col. Williams writes thus:

"Bush River, *June* 23*d*, 1781.

"*Dear Bro.*—The circumstances of the war, in this part of the world, have had a material alteration since I had the pleasure to write you. After Lord Rawdon's retreat from Camden, Gen. Greene pushed his operations southwardly, and has obliged the enemy to abandon or surrender all their posts in South Carolina, except Charleston and Ninety-six. On the 22d ult. our little army invested the last mentioned place, and continued the siege with infinite labor and alacrity till the 20th inst., when we were obliged to relinquish an object, which, if attained, would not only have given peace to this distracted country, but would have added a lustre to our former services, sufficiently brilliant to have thrown a proper light upon the character of our excellent General, and reflected a ray of glory upon the reputation of each inferior officer. Though we have been greatly disappointed, no troops ever deserved more credit for their exertions. The operations were prosecuted with indefatigable zeal and bravery, and the place was defended with spirit and address. Our loss is Capt. Armstrong, of the Maryland Line, killed; Capt. Benson, dangerously wounded, and Lieut. Duvall, also wounded. Besides officers, we lost fifty-eight men killed, sixty-nine wounded, and twenty missing. From this account you will conclude that a day seldom passed without execution, and

I can assure you that each night rather promoted than diminished the mischief. We succeeded so far as to take one of the enemy's redoubts, and in all probability a few days more would have happily concluded the business. But Lord Rawdon had received a strong reinforcement, and by making forced marches, arrived in time to avert the impending fate of the garrison. I cannot ascertain the loss the enemy may have sustained, but judging by our own, it cannot be inconsiderable. Our approaches were carried by two trenches and a mine to within a few feet of the ditch of their strongest fort, and our troops once took possession of it, but their works were too strong to be escaladed. Instances of consummate bravery were exhibited, but their fire was too fatal for our people to remain in their fosse, and we were obliged to leave it with loss."

But the most important battle, and the last of consequence, was that of Eutaw. It was by no means as decisive as that of Cowpens, but it was instrumental in putting an end to the war. Col. Williams displays his knowledge of the enemy, and his skill as a soldier, in this prognostic of the battle, which happened four days after that he writes as follows from

"Fort Mott, on the Congaree River, *Sept. 4th*, 1781.

"I wrote last from the high hills of Santee, from which the army moved the 23d of August, with the view of attacking the enemy at Thompson's Farm, which is within half a mile of this place, but having a large circuit to make before we could pass the Wateree and Congaree rivers, which lay between us, the enemy took the opportunity of retiring to Nelson Ferry, which is on the Santee River, about forty miles below the confluence of the first mentioned rivers, which form the last, within sight of our present position.

"Having got the enemy so low down the country, a great point is gained, and puts the laboring oar into their hands.

"We shall not be under the necessity of fighting, neither shall we avoid it if a favorable opportunity offers. These large rivers, which have all extensive marshy shores and but few ferries, embarrass us on account of transporting our baggage, and will subject the army to some inconvenience, but our circum-

stances, taken altogether, are very different from what they were three months ago, and are indeed a perfect contrast to the adverse fortune that followed the heels of our retreating troops last winter. If Col. Stewart, who has commanded the army since Lord Rawdon's departure for Europe, thinks proper to risk an action, he will be beaten."

Here we have his account of the battle itself:

"The British army, being reinforced by the 3d regiment, contrary to my expectations, advanced from Orangeburgh to Congaree, and encamped at Col. Thompson's, about one mile from Fort Mott, which we had reduced some time before. It is said they exultingly gave three cheers upon regaining that position. The two armies remained neighbors, and were separated by the Santee, from early in August till the 23d of that month, when Gen. Greene took the resolution to remove Col. Stewart, (who succeeded Gen. Rawdon in command,) or give him battle.

"It was impossible to pass the rivers Wateree and Congaree immediately in front, and as their confluence is but a little to our left, it was not considered eligible to cross the Santee below the enemy for obvious reasons: we had a junction to form with the State troops and militia, whose numbers were not ascertained, and without them we were greatly inferior in force to the enemy. Therefore the General ordered us to march by the right, and we passed the rivers above, which induced the British army to retire to Eutaw Springs, about thirty-five miles from Thompson's and about two from Nelson's Ferry over the Santee. Gen. Greene did not approve of their holding that post, and as his forces were now collected, he determined to prosecute his plan of giving battle or removing them to a more peaceful distance. By easy marches we arrived at Burdell's, seven miles from Eutaw, in the afternoon of the 7th inst., and orders were given for marching again next morning, at four o'clock, to attack the enemy.

"At four o'clock next morning we were under arms, and moved in order of battle about three miles, when we halted, and took a little of that liquid which is not unnecessary to exhilarate the animal spirits upon such occasions. Again we ad-

vanced, and soon afterwards our light troops met the van of the enemy, who were marching out to meet us.

"Very serious, very important reflections began to obtrude. But liberty or death; peace and independence; or glory and a grave. The enemy's van was soon driven to their line, and our troops displayed. Our militia, which composed the front line, seconded the attack, and behaved better than usual. The North Carolina brigade of Continentals were next engaged, and acquired honor by their firmness. The Virginians advanced with impetuosity, and beat their foes wherever they found them. And the little remnant of Maryland troops, with an intrepidity which was particularly noticed by our gallant commander, advanced in good order, with trailed arms, and without regarding or returning the enemy's fire, charged and broke their best troops. Then, indeed, we fired and followed them into their camp, near which is a thick wood, very unfavorable to cavalry. But Col. Washington, impatient perhaps for a more favorable opportunity, charged upon the enemy's right, where unluckily their flank companies were posted. He received a very galling fire, by which his horse fell in front of his dragoons. In an instant his breast was pierced by a bayonet, which however wounded him but slightly. His cavalry was repulsed, and that excellent officer became a captive.

"Our loss in officers killed and wounded was very considerable, and the eagerness of the pursuit had thrown most of the troops into disorder, which could not now be remedied. Some were taking prisoners, and others plundering the enemy's camp, while they in despair sought refuge in and about a strong brick house which stood in the midst of it, and from whence their fire began to gall us exceedingly. About this time General Greene had brought our two six pounders within one hundred yards of the house, and I believe by accident or mistake, two others which we had taken were brought to the same place. At this critical juncture the enemy made a conclusive effort, which not only did them great honor, but, in my opinion, was the salvation of their whole army. Major Majoribanks sallied briskly from behind a picket garden, charged our artillery, and

carried the pieces, which they immediately secured under the walls of their citadel.

"As our two three pounders and one which we had taken in the field, were all dismounted, it was useless to attempt any thing further with the small arms. The General, therefore, ordered the troops to retire, which was done gradually, the enemy not presuming to follow. The cavalry of the legion kept that of the enemy in awe, but found no good opportunity to cut them.

"The Delaware battalion and legion infantry acted with their usual vivacity, and were among those who did the most execution. As the Eutaw Spring was within fifty yards of the house, and there was no other water nearer than Burdell's, we retired in the afternoon to that place, which gave the enemy an opportunity of burying as many of their dead as their stay would admit. They abandoned the post early on the night of the 9th, leaving upwards of sixty of their dead unburied, and sixty or seventy wounded that could not be carried off. We pursued them about thirty-five miles, and though their army was reinforced by Major McArthur's detachment of 300 or 400 men from Monks' Corner, they thought proper to retire to a strong position on the south side of Ferguson's swamp, in the night of the 10th, when we lay at the Trout Spring, within five miles of them.

"They retired to Fair Lawn, below Monks', and on the morning of the 13th the General ordered the army to return to its former position at the high hills of Santee. This expedition was made in the season of the year which is most sickly in this country; and you cannot conceive how much more lamentable it is to lose an officer in sick quarters, than to see him fall in the field. There, there is no duration of that toilsome anxiety which we suffer for a languishing friend, besides his exit is glorious and, we believe, happy.

"Upon re-perusal of this circumstantial sheet, I do not think I have said enough of the bravery of the American troops. To have an idea of their vivacity and intrepidity, you must have shared their danger and seen their charge, which exceeded any thing of the sort I ever saw before.

"The battle of Eutaw, was an example of what I conceive to be obstinate fair field fighting, and it is worthy of remark, that it happened on the same spot of ground where, according to the tradition of this country, a very bloody, desperate battle was fought about a century ago, between the savage natives and the barbarous Europeans who came to dispossess them of their property, which, in soil, is as rich as any upon the continent, or can be any where else. On the spot where the conflict of bayonets decided the victory, is a monument or mound of earth, said to have been erected over the bodies of the brave Indians who fell in defence of their country. Will any such honorable testimony be erected to the memory of our departed heroes?"

Both parties claimed the victory, and according to Gen. Tarlton's narrative, it was a most brilliant triumph for the British. It had, however, great weight in favor of the Americans. Williams' conduct in this engagement was most distinguished, and won for him the entire approbation and praise of General Greene and the army. Indeed, Greene says: "I cannot help acknowledging my obligations to Col. Williams for his great activity on this and many other occasions, in forming the army, and for his uncommon intrepidity in leading on the Maryland troops to the charge." Williams might, indeed, well be proud of such commendation, but he now knew that he had done all in his power for the country, and he yearned to return to the bosom of his family. A sense of duty alone made him a soldier; there was in him no desire of mere military distinction, but of

> "that good fame,
> Without which glory's but a tavern song."

He would have chosen to live on the old homestead, had not the cry of his country rung in his ears, and when he was at last free to set his face homewards, how gladly did he depart. He writes to his brother:

"My disposition is wholly domestic; my feelings flow with excess of tenderness whenever I indulge the thoughts of home. There I will be as soon as I can quit the field with honor, and sooner you don't expect me. The hope of terminating this tour of service with a little good fortune, and of returning once

more to my friends, supports me under all my anxiety and danger. I am happy in my office, in my command, and in my connections. My health is seldom impaired, though my feelings are wounded every day by such circumstances as I have frequently related—so that I have a mixture of pleasure and pain in the exercise of my profession, which I ardently wish I may soon have an honorable opportunity of changing for some silent, sweet domestic occupation. Then will I take you and my fond sisters in my arms, and live with you in peace."

The military career of Williams now drew rapidly to a close, and the remainder of his days were passed in the repose he so ardently loved. But toward the close of the war he was sent by Greene with despatches to Congress, and became Brigadier General by brevet. Much as he merited the honor, it caused some dissatisfaction among his brother officers, and Greene writes to him on this subject, in connection with others, as follows:

"I wrote you, my dear General, some time past, in answer to your letter. In mine I congratulated you on your promotion, from which I felt a singular happiness, but observed at the same time, that the manner was more honorable to you, than satisfactory to the other Colonels of the army. Your right of promotion, which took place from the United States being formed into districts, was repealed before your promotion took place, and being promoted upon a principle of merit, the Colonels feel an injury in the comparison that their merit is less conspicuous than yours. Col. Pinkney wrote me on the subject, and I believe has written to Congress. I gave him copies of my letters to Congress, which were satisfactory. I expect other Colonels will feel the same injury, and very likely make the same application.

"The love of rank is so strong a principle in the breast of a soldier, that he who has a right to promotion will never admit another over his head upon a principle of merit. You are not to expect that every body will subscribe to the justice of your promotion. You must content yourself with having obtained it, and that no man is without his enemies but a fool. I am glad to hear the sentiments of the public are so flattering to the Southern army. The Southern States have acted generously

by me, and if I can close the business honorably here, I shall feel doubly happy, happy for the people and happy for myself. I think the public are not a little indebted for our exertions. The Southern States were lost, they are now restored; the American arms were in disgrace, they are now in high reputation. The American soldiery were thought to want both patience and fortitude to contend with difficulties: they are now remarkable for both. That sentiment had taken deep root in Europe, but it is now totally changed. Indeed, the change of British administration is in a great degree owing to our efforts, and the consequences resulting from them.

"I hope I don't arrogate too much in saying this, and in saying we have contributed not a little to the glory of the nation and the American arms. I find by a Parliamentary Register, that there were 18,000 troops and upwards, in the Southern department last year, besides the militia which acted with the enemy, and those amounted to not less than 2,000, exclusive of the negroes, and they had more than 1,000 of them on the different military departments of the army. This includes Lord Cornwallis' army in Virginia. At the time the battle of Eutaw was fought by the enemy, from returns laid before Parliament, it appears they had in Charleston and in their advanced army, 6,700 men fit for duty, besides all the militia and negroes. What an amazing difference between their force and ours! From these authorities, I find our operations were much more glorious than ever we considered them."

Gen. Greene and Gen. Williams were equally zealous in defending each other's reputation, and at a later period when Greene himself was made the subject of animadversion, Williams defends him in a strain of indignation and sarcasm, in the following letter to Maj. Edwards:

"The late revolution in South Carolina is owing not only to a change of circumstances, but to a change of men in the government of that country. How daringly impudent it is for those who have been rescued from misery and dejection, to arraign the virtue that saved them. Gen. Greene exercised a superior judgment, changed the system of military operations in that country, and used the only possible means of recovering it—

and dare the ingrates now accuse him of any interested design, or any view of ambition, other than that which receives its highest gratification from the thanks and approbation of a free people? And do the devils dare to treat with neglect and contempt that little corps of gallant men who saved them from despair and slavery? Their ingratitude proves manifestly, how well they deserved the chains which have been taken off their necks. There are many sensible, amiable characters in Carolina, but I always feared the majority were envious, jealous, malicious, designing, unprincipled people. Come one, come all of you away and leave them. I am glad to hear the Northern troops are returning. Though I cannot flatter myself with the pleasure of seeing them rewarded as they deserve, there will be something done for them, they will not starve on the same fields in which they have bled."

It will not be of purpose to dwell much longer upon the subject before us, for Gen. Williams did not live many years more to enjoy the fruits of his hard toil. He settled in Baltimore and was appointed to the collectorship of the port, by the Governor of the State, the duties of which he discharged with the same exemplary fidelity which had attended his military career. When the Federal Constitution was adopted, he was re-appointed to the same office, which he continued to hold as long as he lived. In 1786, he was happily married to the second daughter of Mr. William Smith, a very wealthy and influential merchant, and his union was productive of the complete felicity he so well deserved. His habits of industry, economy and method, joined to the lucrative office he held, enabled him among much other property, to buy the old home of his father, on the banks of the Potomac, which in the midst of the battle field's "dreadful array," he had so often fondly returned to in imagination. Here he was pleasantly employed in improving the condition of the farm, and in laying out the present town of "Williamsport," called after his own name. It was at one time thought that the seat of government would be at Williamsport, and there are several letters from the General's brother on the subject, and written in a very hopeful strain: one of great length detailing an account of Gen. Washington's visit to Springfield's farm,

(for such is its name,) with speculations on the site of the Federal seat. On this letter Gen. Williams has endorsed the words "All a Hum," and Williamsport has remained to this day, rather a village than a city of magnificent distances.

The health of Gen. Williams became much impaired, and disease attacked his lungs, but he still continued his duties. He had many friends in and out of the army, and he delighted to keep up a correspondence with them. None thought more highly of him as a soldier and a man, than Washington, and such names as Greene, Knox, Lincoln, Lee, Steuben, Kosciusko, and many more, form those of intimate and tried associates. Nor was he less solicitous to preserve unbroken friendship with many unknown to fame, and with a large family circle. The wealth that he acquired was liberally dispensed, and his bounty was always readily extended to the deserving. To his brother he says in one of his letters—"Whatever is mine in Maryland is yours, and I really don't know what you mean by my money in your hands." So highly was he esteemed by Gen. Washington; that in 1792, on the refusal of Gen. Morgan to accept the actual rank of Brigadier General, Gen. Knox being then Secretary of War, wrote to Williams that the President would be highly pleased to appoint him to the post, which would make him the eldest Brigadier General, and second in command, and he was accordingly actually so nominated. But this honor he positively declined in several letters to the President and Secretary Knox, on account of ill health and family duties; and he also adds that it would be no stimulus to his ambition to be second in command. His illness still increasing upon him, he was induced in 1793 to try the effect of sea air, and a voyage to Barbadoes had some benefit, but of very short duration.

And now the light which he created and shed around him, was to be withdrawn from those who looked as upon the rainbow's glories after a stormy day; for just as they were encircled by its arch of splendor, in radiant promise of sunny skies, they beheld its brilliant hues melting into air, as the luminary whence they emanated sunk solemnly from their sight. In the next year, 1794, while on his way to the Sweet Springs, in Virginia, on reaching the little town of Woodstock, he became too ill to pro-

ceed farther, and on the 16th of July, at the early age of 45, he died. He was prepared; he had lived the full measure of his fame; his life had been glorious and happy; he had shrunk from no responsibility; he had feared nothing but to do wrong; he had gained "honor, love, obedience, troops of friends," and when at last he met the unconquerable foe, it was with the same calm courage and reliance on a higher power, that had been his trust when he had rushed into mortal battle.

He left an ample fortune to his four sons, and committed them to their mother's father, saying in his will, that he could do so with entire trust, "as soon as it should please Heaven to remove him from that endearing office." In the eloquent language of the Spaniard, himself a soldier as well as a poet,

"As thus the dying warrior prayed,
Without one gathering mist or shade
Upon his mind;
Encircled by his family,
Watched by affection's gentle eye
So soft and kind—

"His soul to him who gave it, rose:
God lead it to its long repose,
Its glorious rest!
And though the warrior's sun is set,
Its light shall linger round us yet,
Bright, radiant, blest."

On the banks of the lordly Potomac his remains repose, beneath a simple monument crowning the summit of a hill, overlooking a wild expanse of waving woods and pleasant fields, and distant mountains, which he once delighted to look upon. The setting sun sheds its glories over that peaceful landscape; the river flows calmly by many a pleasant village, by the marble palaces of the busy Metropolis, and by the tomb of him who has given it his name. Heroes, patriots and friends, both sleep by the same river; both firm in love of peace but hatred of tyranny, and both spared to be cheered by the smiles of their country, whose battles they had fought while she pined in fetters and in tears.